



OFFICIAL STUDY GUIDE 2001 EDITION



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COLLEGE-LEVEL EXAMINATION PROGRAM

II. Taking the Examinations

A person may know a great deal about the subject being tested but not be able to demonstrate it on the exam. Knowing how to approach an exam is an important part of the testing process. While a command of test-taking skills cannot substitute for knowledge of the subject matter, it can be a significant factor in successful testing.

Test-taking skills enable a person to use all available information to earn a score that truly reflects her or his ability. There are different strategies for approaching different kinds of exam questions. For example, free-response questions require a very different approach than do multiple-choice questions. Other factors, such as how the exam will be graded, may also influence your approach to the exam and your use of test time. Thus, your preparation for an exam should include finding out all you can about the exam so that you can use the most effective test-taking strategies.

Before taking an exam, you should know approximately how many questions are on the test, how much time you will be allowed, how the test will be scored or graded, whether there is a penalty for wrong answers, what types of questions and directions are on the test, and how you will be required to record your answers. All this information for CLEP exams is discussed in the preceding pages or in the individual examination guides. The following sections summarize some of the strategies that you may use in taking multiple-choice and free-response exams.

Taking Multiple-Choice Exams

1. Listen carefully to the instructions given by the test administrator and read carefully all directions in the test book before you begin to answer the questions.
2. Note the time that the test administrator starts timing the test. As you proceed, make sure that you are not working too slowly. You should have answered at least half the questions in a section when half the time for that section has passed. If you have not reached that point in the section, speed up your pace on the remaining questions.

3. Before answering a question, read the entire question, including all the answer choices. Don't think that because the first or second answer choice looks good to you, it isn't necessary to read the remaining options. Instructions usually tell you to select the "best" answer. Sometimes one answer choice is partially correct but another option is better; therefore, it is usually a good idea to read all the answers before you choose one.
4. Read and consider every question. Questions that look complicated at first glance may not actually be so difficult once you have read them carefully.
5. Do not puzzle too long over any one question. If you don't know the answer after you've considered it briefly, go on to the next question. Mark that question in your test book and go back to it later, if you have time.
6. Make sure you record your response on the answer sheet or microcomputer screen beside the same number as the number of the question in the test book. If you skip a question, be sure you also skip a space on the answer sheet or microcomputer screen. If you have not answered all the questions in a section when you are told to go on to the next section, be sure to skip the spaces for those questions on your answer sheet. If you discover that you have been marking your answers in the wrong spaces, tell the test supervisor. The test supervisor will note this in the Irregularity Report that will be returned to ETS with the answer sheets, and your answer sheet will be hand-scored.
7. Certain foreign language and mathematics tests have only four answer options to choose from, "A" through "D," even though the answer sheet has five lettered answer spaces for each question. Be careful not to mark answers you intend as "D" in the "E" spaces; "E" answers will not be counted toward your score.
8. Don't hesitate to write notes or to do your calculations in your test book. The test books will not be used again, nor will anything you write in the test book affect your score. Be sure to record all of your answers in the correct space on the answer sheet. Do not, however, make any unnecessary marks on your answer sheet, and be sure you erase all stray marks completely.

9. In trying to determine the correct answer, you may find it helpful to cross out those options that you know are incorrect, and to make marks next to those you think might be correct. If you decide to skip the question and come back to it later, you will save yourself the time of reconsidering all the options.

10. Watch for the following key words in test questions:

all	generally	never	perhaps
always	however	none	rarely
but	may	not	seldom
except	must	often	sometimes
every	necessary	only	usually

When a question or answer option contains words such as “always,” “every,” “only,” “never,” and “none,” there can be no exceptions to the answer you choose. Use of words such as “often,” “rarely,” “sometimes,” and “generally” indicates that there may be some exceptions to the answer.

11. Do not guess wildly or randomly fill in answers to questions you do not have time to read, because there is a penalty for incorrect answers on CLEP exams. (An explanation of the procedures used for scoring CLEP exams is given in Chapter 3.) It is improbable that mere guessing will improve your score significantly; it may even lower your score, and it does take time. If, however, you are not sure of the correct answer but have some knowledge of the question and are able to eliminate one or more of the answer choices as wrong, your chance of getting the right answer is improved and, on the average, it will be to your benefit to answer such a question.

12. Do not waste your time looking for clues to right answers based on flaws in question wording or patterns in correct answers. Professionals at the College Board and ETS put a great deal of effort into developing valid, reliable, and fair exams. CLEP test development committees are composed of college faculty who are experts in the subject covered by the exam and are appointed by the College Board to write test questions and to scrutinize each question that is included on a CLEP exam. Committee members make every effort to ensure that the questions are not ambiguous, that they have only one correct answer, and that they cover college-level topics. These committees do not intentionally include “trick”

questions. If you think a question is flawed, ask the test administrator to report it, or write immediately to College Board Test Development, P.O. Box 6600, Princeton, NJ 08541-6600. Include the name of the exam and test center, the exam date, and the number of the exam question. All such inquiries are investigated by the ETS test development staff.

Taking Essay Exams

If your college requires the optional essay portion of any of the four CLEP Subject Examinations in Composition and Literature or the General Examination in English Composition with Essay, you should do some additional preparation for your CLEP exam. Taking an essay or a problem-solving test is very different from taking a multiple-choice test, so you will need to use some other strategies.

The essay written as part of the General Examination in English Composition is graded by English professors from a variety of colleges and universities. A process called holistic scoring is used to rate your writing ability. This process is explained in the examination guide for the General Examination in English Composition. The handbook also includes graded sample essays and essay questions.

The optional essay portions of the Subject Examinations in Composition and Literature, on the other hand, are graded by the faculty of the college you designate as a score recipient. Guidelines and criteria for grading essays are not specified by the College Board or ETS. You may find it helpful, therefore, to talk with someone at your college to find out what criteria will be used to determine whether you will get credit. Ask how much emphasis will be placed on your writing ability and your ability to organize your thoughts as opposed to your knowledge of the subject matter. Find out how much weight will be given to your multiple-choice test score in comparison with your free-response grade in determining whether you will get credit. This will give you an idea of where you should expend the greatest effort in preparing for and taking the exam.

Here are some strategies you will find useful in taking any essay exam:

1. Before you begin to write, read all the questions carefully and take a few minutes to jot down some ideas you might include in each answer.
2. If you are given a choice of questions to answer, choose the questions that you think you can answer most clearly and knowledgeably.

3. Determine in what order you will answer the questions. Answer those you find the easiest first so that any extra time can be spent on the more difficult questions.
4. When you know which questions you will answer and in what order, determine how much testing time remains and estimate how many minutes you will devote to each question. Unless suggested times are given for the questions or one question appears to require more or less time than the others, allot an equal amount of time to each question.
5. Before answering each question, indicate the number of the question as it is given in the test book. You need not copy the entire question from the question sheet, but it will be helpful to you and to the person grading your test if you indicate briefly the topic you are addressing — particularly if you are not answering the questions in the order in which they appear on the exam.
6. Before answering each question, read it again carefully to make sure you are interpreting it correctly. Underline key words, such as those listed below, that often appear in free-response questions. Be sure you know the exact meaning of these words before taking the exam.

analyze	demonstrate	enumerate	list
apply	derive	explain	outline
assess	describe	generalize	prove
compare	determine	illustrate	rank
contrast	discuss	interpret	show
define	distinguish	justify	summarize

If a question asks you to “outline,” “define,” or “summarize,” do not write a detailed explanation; if a question asks you to “analyze,” “explain,” “illustrate,” “interpret,” or “show,” you must do more than briefly describe the topic.